Monster Hunting Supplies by BadOldWest

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Summary:

The ticket was to a film she doesn't remember because she must have slept through it. But that was from a long time ago, because she has issues with movies.

In movies, the monsters all get killed and everyone goes back to normal. Romance blooms. The bloody prom queen gets wrapped in a shock blanket by EMTs as the police cars carry away the slasher, and she's expected to go back to her old life and be the same person she was before. Or all the aliens vanish and suddenly a half-destroyed earth is triumphant.

She had tried to go back to normal, tried to make everything normal, but when everything was going on in Hawkins she had found how liberated she felt, and then it was over and she had to go back to normal again. How can you go back?

Monster Hunting Supplies

There's a lot you can tell about a woman from what she keeps in her handbag.

See, she's not really stealing. She's investigating. It's a compulsion, a dangerous one, that she goes through purses left unattended.

There are preventative measures for some people's idea of an emergency: tampons, breath mints, hand sanitizer, condoms.

Sometimes a bottle of mace.

But it's also drowning in crap; receipts, event planners, business cards, lipsticks, walkmans, hair clips.

Nancy travels lighter.

Contents of Nancy's purse:

Hunting knife

Lighter

Pack of clove cigarettes

Pocket knife

Small bottle of lighter fluid

Keys

Empty beer bottle (in case of emergency break glass)

A third knife

Wallet

Hair ties

And a movie ticket stub

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Her mother worried, calling her maladjusted:

"Honey, this all happened so long ago, you're supposed to have moved on from it by now. Can't you just pursue a normal life? Steve asked about you-"

She stopped taking her calls after that time.

Normal was fucking boring.

So when that sway of a third drink starts rolling her head back and forth, Nancy does what she always does around this time.

Scoops an unwatched purse up off the beer-soaked floor and sneaks to the bathroom with it to investigate.

Locked in a stall, she paws through the purse.

Stranger's Purse:

Wallet, keys

Pack of gum

A small pocket-album filled with pictures of a girl with two front teeth missing, background heavy and black from the flash of a crappy camera and amateur photographer

Enough makeup for a quick touch up in the car

Sharpie

Compact

A wedding ring (removed for bar-appropriate singleness)

Birth control pills

Antidepressants

Not as selfless as her self-diagnosed Robin Hood title implied, she took one or two of the prescription pills, staring at the stall graffiti as she swallowed them down.

She still looks at every wall for the scrawl of **Nancy Wheeler is a Slut.**

Nancy takes the sharpie out of the stranger's purse, instead writes **Have you seen Barb?**

It's not funny. It's not meant to be. She's just asking.

She scrubs a hand through the weight of her hair on her scalp. Scratches. Drags the hand down to her face to cover her mouth.

The purse sits heavily on her lap.

She's just investigating the emergencies that others are preparing for.

She takes too long, breathes alone in the blinding white halogen for too long, she could get caught. She has to move quickly.

She dumps the purse under the bar and slips out the back door.

She hears someone say “Was *this* your purse?” and a relieved cry before the door closes.

She jogs to her car, and doesn’t let her heart relax until she’s pulled out of the parking lot.

She drives back to the woods. She technically *got out* of Hawkins, but not by much, and it wasn’t really an upgrade. She never really got away. Tried to do better for herself, striking out on her own in a basement apartment that looked like it was stocked for the apocalypse. The last few men she brought home did take note of that.

She should stay away.

But she needs to see.

She didn’t want to become her parents, she didn’t want to be someone else, and she didn’t want to be herself, so she was just kind of nobody.

She has knives in her purse. She has bear traps and three square, unexpirable meals stashed in her trunk. She has a baseball bat on the floor of the backseat.

Her car has been stocked for this journey for years.

She pulls over in the woods and settles on the hood of her car, brights killed. Engine off. Remarkably stupid, but so is the audacity to hunt a monster as a child.

There’s a pull into the woods, and she fights it, a harsher craving than any substance can give her. The urge is there. Her knee bounces idly as she pulls herself back from it. But she doesn’t leave, which is what the logical voice in her head is telling her.

A car pulls up beside her, lights turned off. Like someone’s trying to observe nature without startling any deer.

She had a feeling about this happening.

Jonathan slips out of the car, gazes past her into the woods, before he presents herself in front of her perch on the hood of her car. She nods in acknowledgement. She doesn't really want this to be the reunion they'd been holding off on, not like this. She had pictured a lame Christmas Eve where both of their mothers forgot cranberry sauce and sent them to the store to get some at the same time. In the same aisle. Clutching the cans they sought, asking about children, asking about anything.

Sheepish and halogen-lit, a little too bright, trying their best to hide how little they'd moved on.

At least they hadn't moved on *together*.

He dropped his backpack at her feet, lightening his load, and straightened his back to look down at her.

Jonathan did more with just *looking* than most people did with their entire lives. It's what made him such a good photographer.

"Hey."

"Hey."

"I'd hoped I'd never find you here again."

I wanted for you to move on.

He shook his head, hands in his pockets, that eerily calm gaze extending over her shoulder into the woods.

"You know the saying, 'If you stare into the abyss, it stares back into you'?"

She nods. Stares at her boot. Heavy, for running.

"If you want it to stop, you have to stop looking, Nancy."

She pursed her lips and reached down, between her casually-splayed legs, for his backpack on the ground. She hefted it onto the trunk

with her.

Backpack:

Bottle of lighter fluid

Matches

Camera

Three rolls of film

Flashlight

Hunting knife

Bandages (she always forgot to pack medical supplies, just weapons)

A sheathed machete

He traveled lighter than her.

The machete she unsheathes, examining the blade in the moonlight. At this, she can't help but giggle. He smiles in response, and he looks young again.

"This I like. I want one."

He rolls his eyes, grabs her wrist and carefully pries it out of her hands. "Please don't tell me you need one."

She liked his hand untangling hers, the other braced on her elbow to keep the knife steady so no one lost an eye. He was dangerous, but careful. When it was gone, she missed it.

She leans back on the hood, shrugging as she chews her lip. There's a sadness that's returned between them.

"Have you ever felt safe, since it happened?"

He tosses the sheathed weapon back into his bag and joins her on the hood. His weight lowers the car further to the ground, but she wouldn't kick him off for anything.

"No," he admits, and there's mist escaping on his breath. She shivers.

There's a hole in the knee of her jeans. He taps his finger against the exposed skin. She feels the tap in her throat, her chest, her core. Her thighs clench. Then he hooks his fingers under the crook of her knee and tugs gently, and she complies, leaning on his shoulder and letting him rest his chin on her head. One arm goes around her shoulders as they look into the woods.

It's still scary, but she's warmer now. They continue with their staredown with the abyss.

His jeans are less stylishly ripped than hers, but there is some wear in the thigh that she can see some of the hair on his legs. There's an appeal to the idea of being able to circle her fingers over it, probably doing something else while her hands rest there, and she swallows thickly at the thought.

She tilts her head towards him, and he mirrors her.

"Can we ever stop looking?"

He shakes his head.

"I don't think I ever want to stop looking."

But he doesn't look into the woods when he says it. He's looking at her.

Author's Note:

> I've been meaning to enter this fandom since I saw the show last year, especially with the older!Jancy fancast of Norman Reedus and Emmy Rossum.